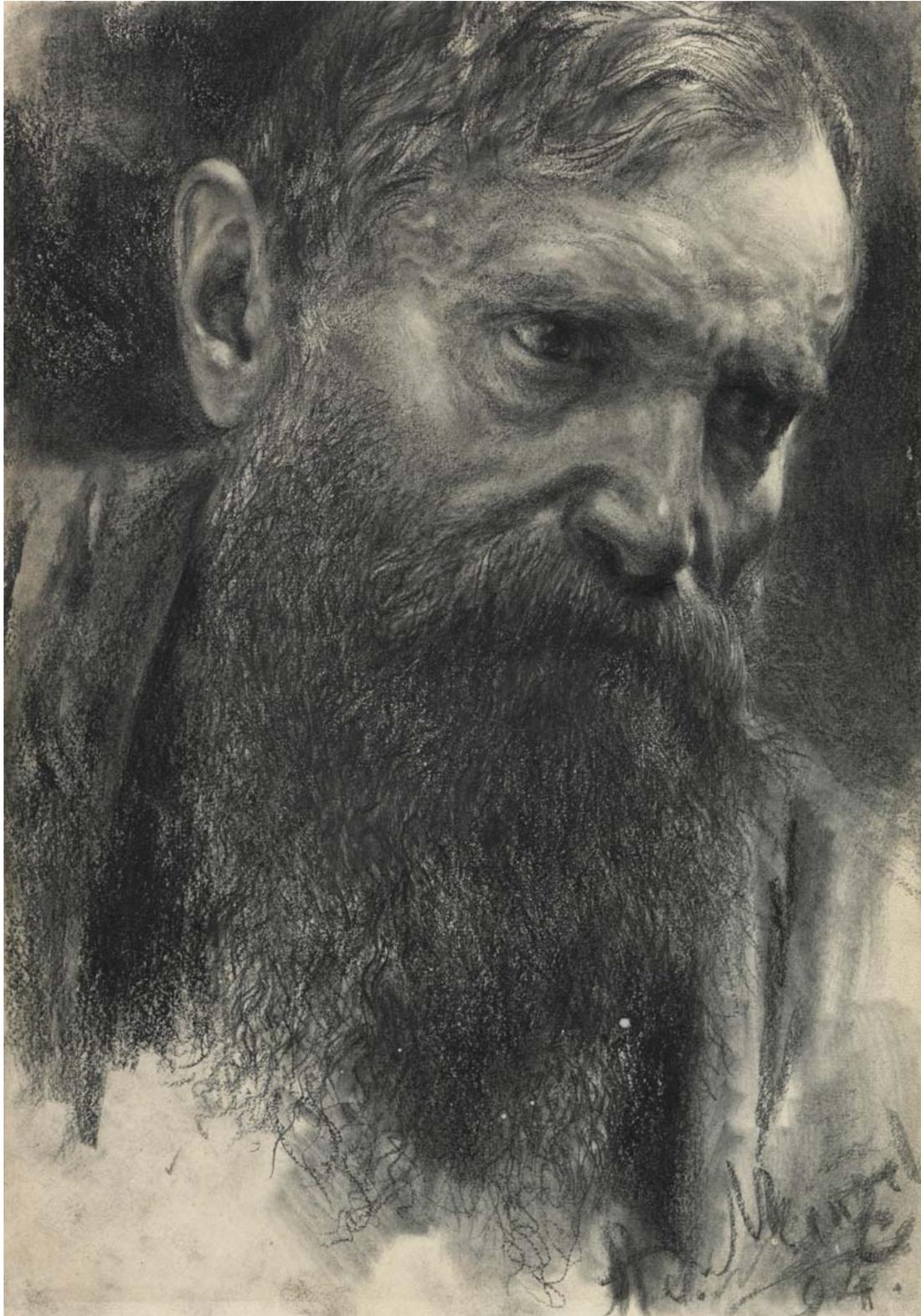


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ADOLPH VON MENZEL

1815 Breslau - Berlin 1905

Head of a Bearded Man in Half-Profile

Carpenter's pencil, with stumping, on paper watermarked *J. Whatman*. 1894.

Signed lower right and dated: *A. Menzel | 94.*

416 x 290 mm

PROVENANCE: Neumeister, Munich, auction sale 259, 12 December 1990, lot 268 – Private collection, Berlin

LITERATURE: Rolf Hochmuth (ed.), *Theodor Storm, Am grauen Meer. Gesammelte Werke, Gedenkausgabe zum 75. Todestag Theodor Storms. Mit Gemälden des neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts und Zeichnungen von Adolph Menzel*, Gütersloh 1962, p. 621, repr.

At the centre of the body of drawings Menzel produced in the last decade of his life is a group of portraits that stand out as evidence of a whole new level of artistic mastery. Many of the works in the series are heads, others are busts or half-figure studies depicting elderly men and women observed in extreme close-up – both in the physical and the metaphorical sense.

Among these late portraits are a large number of free, independent studies that have no connection to the rest of Menzel's *oeuvre*. The present magnificent sheet – most likely an individual portrait of a hitherto unidentified model – belongs to this late series of character heads. The unusually large format of the drawing suggests that the work is more than a casual study. It is a highly finished work of art in its own right – an eloquent portrait that captures the interiority of a troubled individual burdened by his thoughts. Menzel noted: *It's only in old age that a thousand interesting things traverse the human face*. And little by little the ages of the models he portrayed actually increased in step with his own advancing age. It is as if in these life-scarred faces with their lines, furrows and faults he was to find all the technical challenges he still needed as a draughtsman.

This very fine drawing demonstrates Menzel's virtuosity in the use of soft carpenter's pencil. Working with it, he produced a wide range of tone and subtle variations of texture – from fine, delicate strokes to deepest blacks. Densely interwoven clusters of lines alternate with grainy surfaces and the gleam of blank, untouched paper, while the sitter's features are modelled with painterly sensitivity. To achieve this, areas of pencil are rubbed with a stump (made of a thick roll of blotting-paper or chamois leather about one to two centimetres in diameter and pointed on both ends) so that half tones merge and blend, creating constant interaction between black and white. The subtlety and sophistication of Menzel's handling of surfaces is extraordinary, as is his bold use of light to produce strong tonal contrasts alternating between highlights and areas of shadow. The model's head is set against a dark background which heightens the impression of monumentality and acts as a fitting companion to his grave, pensive demeanour.

Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher has examined this drawing and confirmed its authenticity.